



## Protecting Seniors from Fraud

Fraud perpetrated against seniors is one of the most heartless crimes of all. Yet when it comes to telemarketing fraud, these criminals see Iowa's seniors as a prime target.

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that one out of six consumers is cheated by telemarketing criminals every year. According to one study, fraudulent telemarketers were directing nearly 80% of their calls at older consumers.

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**By working together, we can do even more to stop fraudulent telemarketers.**

**The Seniors Safety Act can be an important step.**

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'Betty' from Fort Madison was one senior who found herself on the receiving end of hundreds of fraudulent telemarketing and mail order schemes. Sadly, she was taken in by offers of cash prizes, cars, and vacations. By the time her family contacted the proper authorities, 'Betty' had spent nearly \$25,000 in just 11 months entering

fraudulent contests.

We need to send a clear message that we will not tolerate crimes against seniors like 'Betty.' That's why I'm working in the Senate to pass the 'Seniors Safety Act.' This much needed legislation would protect Iowa's seniors by empowering law enforcement to cut off phone service for fraudulent telemarketers.

The bill also establishes a 'Better Business Bureau'- style clearinghouse at the Federal Trade Commission to provide seniors and their families with information about prior fraud convictions and/or complaints against the particular company.

The Seniors Safety Act would also help combat nursing home fraud and abuse, enhance safeguards for pension plans and health care benefit programs, and toughen penalties for both economic and physical crimes committed against seniors.

When it comes to telemarketing fraud, seniors can also fight back. The best defense against telemarketing fraud is to be alert to the different schemes these criminals use. The National Fraud Information Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to fighting fraud, offers the following tips on how to avoid becoming the victim of consumer fraud:

The caller asks for your Social Security number, credit card number, bank account number, or other financial information when you aren't buying anything or paying with those accounts. Legitimate companies only ask for financial information to bill you or debit your account for purchases you've agreed to make.

You get a call or postcard from someone telling you you've won a prize and asking for payment to buy something, for processing or administrative fees, for customs, for taxes, or any other reason. Legitimate sweepstakes or prize offers don't ask for payment because it's illegal.

The caller is asking for a donation but won't tell you exactly how the money will be used and how you can verify the charity and what it does. Legitimate charities are willing to say what percentage of contributions is used for services and how much goes to overhead and fundraising. They are also willing to tell consumers who they can check with to confirm that they are legitimate.

For more tips and information, you can visit the National Fraud Information Center web site at: or call them at 1-800-876-7060.

You can also report telemarketing fraud and other similar crimes to the Iowa Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division. That's what 'Betty's' family did. The Consumer Protection Division has helped them secure over \$80,000 from companies that targeted 'Betty' with misleading offers. If you or someone you know has been the victim of fraud, contact the Consumer Protection Division at 515.281.5926 or visit their Web site at <http://www.state.ia.us/government/ag/>.